



Jackson Public Schools changes administration of preschool programs, teachers face layoffs

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JACKSON, MI – The administration of **Jackson Public Schools' preschool program** is changing next year, but officials say families should feel no disruption.



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Mrs. Jeanne McCutchen works with students during 'table time' Wednesday afternoon in her preschool classroom at Northeast Elementary School. McCutchen and six other teachers with the Jackson Public Schools (JPS) preschool program are being affected by collaboration changes involving JPS and the Community Action Agency.

Legislation that passed last year requires that the Great Start Readiness Program money that local districts used to get directly from the state for preschool classes will now go to intermediate school districts, which will administer preschool programs for all districts in their counties. In JPS, that means that the \$750,000 it used to get from the state for its preschool classes at Frost, Hunt, McCulloch and Northeast elementary schools will now go to the Jackson County Intermediate School District.

Classes will stay put in their regular JPS buildings, said Superintendent Dan Evans, but changes could be coming in who teaches them. On Monday, the **Jackson School Board** unanimously approved going with the ISD's plan to contract with Community Action Agency for preschool teachers. "We have collaborated with Community Action Agency in the past, and I believe this will be a smooth move for children," said Nancy Tuckey, JPS' director of early childhood programs. "I believe there will be no disruption in services for kids."

It's a different matter for the seven JPS preschool teachers and seven classroom aides. They will receive pink slips at the end of the year, Evans said. However, they will be able to take a different job within JPS depending on the availability of jobs, their seniority and their certification, Evans said. And CAA also has said it will give priority

consideration to those who would like to take a teaching position there, he said. "With our past budget cuts, we are extremely low on administrators in our buildings, so this will free our building principals from some of their responsibilities for curriculum and teacher evaluations," Evans said.

JPS also will get some revenue from the ISD, which now will rent its classrooms for preschool classes, Evans said. But the change is a blow to the teachers who also saw changes to their program last year when JPS decided to fund preschool only with GSRP funds and stop supplementing classes with federal Title 1 or general fund dollars. All but two veteran teachers left last year and those who stayed took pay cuts, said Jeanne McCutchen, a preschool teacher at Northeast.

"The staff we have is absolutely excellent," Tuckey said. "They have developed a can-do attitude in taking care of the children, the parents, the curriculum and whatever comes our way. They have performed with excellence."

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